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ARLINGTON, Va. — When we think of war, we think most of the tanks, ships, aircraft and other weapons that each side has, and we talk most about the strategies that the commanders will use as they move their weapons about. As often as not, though, wars are won or lost on the question of supplies.

If the commander in the field does not have the right amount of beans, bullets and fuel at the right time and in the right place, he simply cannot employ his forces as he would like. Logistics usually dominates strategy. The war in the Falklands is no exception.

From the beginning, the British strategy has been to cut off the Falkland Islands from all supplies. First, it was by a sea blockade. Next, that was extended to an air blockade as well. Now, it appears that a siege, or blockade of the capital, Port Stanley, will come next.

The British ground forces are poised in a good position to do just that. Although the British are inferior in numbers, the Argentine defenders are spread widely around two islands. That means that when the British concentrate their forces against any Argentine garrison, they can gain numerical superiority. Only if the Argentines move reinforcements about can they avoid this. The minute they try that, however, the British will use the mobility of their Navy to do an end-run amphibious attack on whatever garrison has been weakened in order to send Argentine reinforcements to another.

The British can use the advantage of their better mobility only if they have adequate supplies. Remember, for instance, that on the average it takes about 10 pounds of food and water to support a soldier every day, which is 25 tons a day for the 5,000 soldiers the reportedly British have ashore — and that does not include a soldier's using even one bullet in fighting.

In this case, a particularly stringent demand is fuel for the helicopters that give the British forces a decided edge in moving over the difficult Falkland terrain. The Argentines clearly understand all this. They see that their only hope is to cut off the British forces ashore from the supplies on the ships of the fleet. That is why we are seeing the repeated furious battles between Argentine aircraft and British ships.

Argentine air power can be much more productive in cutting the supply links than in attacking the British troops on the ground. The troops do not have much equipment or many supply or repair depots that would make good targets.

The War of Supplies

By Stansfield Turner

Can the Argentine forces win this battle to sever the British-supply umbilical cord?

The odds are against the Argentines if the losses in aircraft are anything like what the British are reporting. Yet there are factors that we simply cannot judge from this distance. For instance, thus far the Argentines have sunk only British warships. What if

haps, by good planning by the Argentines. What we are witnessing, then, is a war in which the British have gained such a definite edge in the battlefield that they should win easily, but in which a failure in logistics or the hand of fate across the supply line could lose them much of that advantage. The odds are with the British. The next few days should tell whether that's going to be enough.

Beans, bullets, fuel

they hit an ammunition ship that was in the process of unloading — perhaps a ship that had the only resupply of anti-aircraft missiles? Or, if not ammunition, some other needed supply that it would take weeks to replace from long distance?

We simply do not know enough about the British logistics system to estimate how vulnerable the British forces would be in such a circumstance. Perhaps the ammunition is distributed around enough ships so that the loss of one would not be a catastrophe. It is difficult, though, to rearrange cargoes out at sea, especially in rough waters. Thus, much depends on the foresight of Britain's logistics experts who decided what to load in their supply ships and how to divide it up.

A fundamental point of modern warfare we are seeing here is that distinct targets like ships or large depots or big tanks are increasingly vulnerable.

Modern reconnaissance techniques make such targets more visible; the accuracy of modern weapons means that they can be hit; and the destructiveness of modern weapons bodes ill for those that are hit.

Thus, the British do have to worry not just about the numbers of ships they are losing but also about whether some of particular value may be knocked out by luck or, per-

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